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December 2001

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Rose's Gift





EDITORS' NOTE & LETTERS

Dear Readers,

These have certainly been unusual times. We hope that this issue of *Lutheran Woman Today* brings not only food for thought but words of comfort and inspiration. Please pray for one another, your community, and the citizens of the world as we journey through these days of uncertainty. Pray for peace and understanding. Let your hearts be open to the healing, comfort, and hope that God provides. May God bless us all during this season of peace and hopeful watching and waiting. —The Editors

Letters

Dear Editors,

I love the new format for *LWT*. The poem on the back page (September) thrilled me, especially as I had visited St. Francis's home in Assisi. I am now a widow, 97, but also a graduate of St. Olaf College and a former French teacher. Merci beaucoup.

Arndis Lundeberg Nestande—Mesa, Arizona

Dear Editors,

Thank you for the new look and the great changes. I was also deeply moved by the article "Sounds of Silence." Thank you for sharing God's love in your ministry of *LWT*.

Diane Hilton—St. Helens, Oregon

Dear Editors,

Throughout the years I have been enlightened by the many contemplative articles, and I have especially enjoyed the size of the magazine since it was small and I could easily take it with me. When you announced the change in format, I was a bit annoyed.

But with the first issue, I must tell you that I have changed my mind. It is incredible. What was good has become better; I hesitate to say best because that would leave no opportunity for future improvements.

I was especially impressed with the "Amen!" column. Every sentence spoke to my heart. I have removed it from the magazine and will display it in my office where I can re-read it frequently and others will also benefit from its message.

Mary M. Schoeller—Perkasie, Pennsylvania

Dear Editors,

Nothing ever stays the same! That is probably good, and I hate to think I'm against progress, but is bigger always better? I'm not worried about the quality content in *LWT*, but it means a change in lifestyle now (the smaller version fit in my zippered Bible carrier). Oh well, on to a briefcase-type carrier, I guess.

Norma K. Mossman—Hastings, Minnesota

Subscription questions? See page 43. **Send letters to:** Letters to the Editor, *Lutheran Woman Today*, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4183; email to: lwt@elca.org. Please include your name, city, and state on all correspondence. *LWT* publishes letters representative of those received on a given subject. Letters may be edited for space. Letters must be signed, but requests for anonymity will be honored.

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GIVE US THIS DAY

Is There Room in the Barn?

by Marj Leegard

CHRISTMAS WAS IN THE AIR, IN THE COOKIE JAR, SHINING FROM THE LIGHTED YARD AND EVERYWHERE, AND WE HAD NO IDEA WHAT OUR FIRST-GRADER DREAMED OF GETTING IN HER STOCKING. SHE BOUNCED WITH SECRETS. THE heady accomplishment of making something for Mom and Dad and “not telling” was almost too much to bear. She had the additional tasks of choosing gifts for her big brother, her Sunday School teacher, and for the circle boy whose name she had drawn. There was not a whisper or a dog-eared page in the Sears catalog for a hint of her own desires.

I knitted a pair of bright red mittens for Joe, the circle boy. She wrapped them and off we went to find that every single child at circle unwrapped a coloring book and crayons except Joe. I urged my first-grader to share her book and crayons, but Joe wasn't interested. He sat quietly admiring his mittened hands all during circle Bible study.

But still no ideas. I suggested that she write a letter to Santa, but she wanted to wait until Dad came in from the barn. Since this would be a laborious task filled with questions about spelling, I suggested that she begin, at least. I could tell by the questions that she was past gratitude for last year's puppy or interest in the exact location of the treats for the reindeer.

I tucked her into bed, letter and all. Soon Dad came in to add his goodnight kiss. She said, “I have to ask you something.” And then she whispered, “Is there room in the barn for a pony?”

She had her pony until she was grown, married to the circle boy, and had a daughter of her own. There was room.

I am not that careful when I am making my prayer list. I know what I want, when I want it, and how I would like to have it delivered. I have to be reminded to make sure there is room. How can I possibly pray for God's presence in my sick friend's illness if there is no room in my life for my presence there?

How can I pray for the gift of salvation for others if there is no room in my life for saying a word? How can I pray for power and strength if there is room in my barn for daydreaming but not for action?

Most of all, the great gift of God's Son came by way of a barn where there was room. The story of that birth, life, death, and resurrection came to us because the Holy Spirit found room in lives to carry the message. Is there room in your barn?

LWT columnist Marj Leegard and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.

We Can Do It!



All the day long,
whether rain or shine,
she's part of
the assembly line.

She's making history,
working for victory,
Rosie the Riveter . . .

There's something true about,
Red, white, and blue about
Rosie the Riveter.

(R. Evans and J. Loeb, "Rosie the Riveter," New York: Paramount Music Corp., 1942)

by Barbara Holzhauser

"Rosie" of song and poster fame was a fictional character meant to promote the role of working women as they did their part for the war effort. More than six million women joined the U.S. domestic work force during World War II. While many women laborers were replaced by men at

war's end, Rosie's appearance had set a precedent. Women who found it necessary or chose to do so were afforded greater opportunity to work outside the home.

The publicity caught the eye of a young widow from Pulaski County, Kentucky, who had lost her husband in a car accident. She took a job as a riveter at the Willow Run aircraft factory in Ypsilanti, Michigan. While she lived in a metal Quonset hut close to the plant, her two young children

Rose's Gift

The "Rosie the Riveter" publicity campaign, which ran from 1942 to 1945, was mounted by the government during World War II to recruit women into the work force to take the places of the large number of working men entering the military. The



Rose Monroe circa 1944.

lived on a co-worker's farm. Hollywood actor Walter Pidgeon arrived at the Willow Run plant seeking a woman to play Rosie the Riveter in a war bond film. When Pidgeon learned that the factory had a *real* Rosie—and that she was a riveter—the young woman found herself in the movie.

From that moment on, Rose Will Monroe was associated with the fictional image of “Rosie the Riveter.”

Rose Monroe returned to Louisville after the war, where she shared a home with two of her sisters. Each woman worked a different shift so that they could care for their children. Rose worked in a local aircraft factory at night and attended beauty school during the day. She eventually left the factory,

Jesus Christ had been central to her family life as a child, Rose had not kept that faith connection as an adult. Rose's daughter began attending youth activities at a local church. Her daughter's friends often gathered at Rose's place, where there would be laughter, faith-talk, and sometimes conversation about flying. These conversations eventually led Rose to take some of the young people flying after church on Sundays.

Rose's plane crashed one Sunday. Her young passenger escaped with bruises and a few broken bones. Rose, on the other hand, had internal injuries and broken facial bones, and lay in a coma for five weeks. Once she regained consciousness, the doctors performed reconstructive surgery and later determined that she had lost the sight of one eye. Later, Rose experienced further complications that resulted in the loss of a kidney. Rose's accident became a pivotal moment in her faith life as she began to understand that God had been present throughout all her life's struggles.

When Pidgeon learned that the factory had a real Rosie—and that she was a riveter—the young woman found herself in the movie.

operated a beauty shop, sewed slipcovers and draperies to make extra money, and became the first woman taxi driver in the city. She later remarried, studied for her real estate license, and established her own home construction company, which she called Rose Builders. Through the years, Rose remained interested in airplanes. She had always wanted to move beyond riveting together the parts and to slide behind the controls of a single-engine plane.

In her early fifties, Rose hired an instructor and completed the requirements to get her pilot's license. Rosie earned her wings!

Rose loved to share her interest in flying. It was sharing this interest with others that gradually led her to reconnect with the church. Even though faith in

Rose's second marriage had ended in divorce before the plane accident. Six months after the crash, she met the man who would become her third husband. Early in their marriage, Rose's only son drowned in a boating accident. It was a blow from which she never really recovered.

About ten years ago, while she and her husband were spending the winter in Florida, Rose became ill, suffered heart



Rose's spirit was irrepressible.

and kidney failure, and once again slipped into a coma. Her daughters flew to Florida to be with her. When Rose emerged from the coma, she told them what she had seen while unconscious: "The devil and the Lord were in a battle for my life. The devil was defeated and the Lord won the victory."

This second brush with death led Rose to interpret her struggles through the lens of faith. The apostle Paul's words to the Romans describe Rose's life experience:

"Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom we have obtained access to the grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Romans 5:1-5)

Some time later, Rose's husband was diagnosed with leukemia. As he neared death, he remembered his wife's words and was heard to say, "Now I know what you were talking about!" Family members recall a visible change in his countenance, as he was certain that his eternal future was in God's loving hands. When her husband died, Rose was confident that the Lord had won the final battle and that one day there would be a grand reunion.

The final years of Rose's life were spent battling a variety of illnesses. But in typical "Rosie" fashion, she made every effort to maintain her independence. It was obvious that Rose's body—not her spirit—would be the first to give out. Rose Will Monroe was freed from these earthly bonds on May 31, 1997.

Walter Pidgeon couldn't have picked a more appropriate person to portray the slogan popularized by the Rosie the Riveter campaign—"We can do it!"

Rose was an incredibly gifted woman and graced by God with an irrepressible spirit. The grace of God was clearly at work in her life as shown through the gifts of:

- **DETERMINATION**, exemplified in her tireless work ethic, which contributed to the well-being of her family
- **COMPETENCE**, demonstrated by her many accomplishments and the excellence with which she performed every task
- **VISION**, evidenced by her zeal for life and her recognition that every challenge is an opportunity to grow

Though her gifts were many, Rose's most significant legacy may well be the gift of tenacious faith: a stubborn belief that, no matter how high the mountain or fierce the battle, Jesus Christ has won the victory. Regardless of the determination, competence, or vision we bring to bear when meeting the challenges of this life, the one gift that sustains us all is the person and promise of Jesus Christ.

This article is written with much gratitude to Rose's daughters for sharing the story of their life with their Mom and their faith in Jesus Christ, to the matriarchs of Holy Trinity who worked and served during World War II, to the women who work and witness in the factories of Salem, Ohio, and to my family who, in love, gave me the values of honesty, hard work, and faith in Jesus Christ.

The Rev. Barbara Holzhauser is the Associate Director for Evangelism for the Division for Congregational Ministries of the ELCA.

The Power of One Making a Difference

“I’m just one person.
I can’t make a difference.”

How many times have you heard that? How many times have you said it to yourself? Have you ever thought about what that way of thinking might be preventing you from doing?



Rosa Parks 1964.

Do you think Rosa Parks said this to herself when she refused to move to the back of the bus? Did 13-year-old Nkosi Johnson say this to himself when he took the world stage to draw attention to the AIDS epidemic in Africa? Did Mother Teresa say this when she held the dying of Calcutta in her arms? Or Cesar Chavez when he fought for the human rights of migrant farm workers?

If we view these people as inspiring heroes or exceptional leaders or living saints, we take away their humanity. Let us think of them as ordinary people who realized the “power of one”—the ability of ordinary people using their many gifts and talents to do extraordinary things. And you and I, as ordinary

by Peggy Clark

people, are also just as capable of doing something extraordinary—making a difference in our world.

“But how?” you may ask. “I am just a (fill in the blank). I can’t make a difference.” There’s that way of thinking again. Funny how it comes so easily, isn’t it? I know that this way of thinking has come easily for me. Throughout my life, it has been a useful excuse to limit my own power. And yet all the times I have used that excuse, I have also felt that something was missing. I was not in touch with who I am and what God is calling me to be. I have only recently discovered the best gift of all—that I can make a difference by making my life a gift to others.

I know that I make a difference daily to the people who are in my life each and every day. They are my family, my friends, my co-workers, my neighbors, and my acquaintances. They are the people I ride the train to work with, the checkers at my local grocery store, the salespeople at my favorite department store, and the children who attend the school in my neighborhood. They are all children of God. I have realized that my power lies in connecting with people every day: to meet them where they are and walk with them on their journey, whether it is for a moment or for a lifetime.

Sometimes it may be only a brief connection, yet I strive to make the most of the moment I am in contact with that person. At other times, I look for ways to give people meaningful compliments that will uplift them. And at still other times, I look for the fun in life and seek to share that with everyone I meet.

I also know that I can make a difference to people I probably will never meet. These are the people throughout the world who are victims of injustice

and inhumanity. I see it on television, read about it in the newspaper, and hear about it from people who have lived it. How can I make a difference in addressing such enormous problems? By speaking up against injustice. By volunteering for organizations that are trying to make a difference. By dedicating my emotional, intellectual, and financial resources to working for change. By voting for candidates who I believe will also strive to make a difference. And I pray for those who are in need and keep them close to my heart.

It is through making my life a gift to others that

I am ultimately fulfilled. It is the ultimate paradox—by giving myself away, I have received much in return. “No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl” (Luke 8:16). I am a lamp, and God never meant for me to be covered by a bowl.

We are in December, the gift-giving season. May you take

time in the busyness of this time of year to realize your own precious gifts: the life, love, skills, talents, and spirit that God has bestowed on you to be shared with the world around you. These gifts are what will make a difference. Rosa Parks realized her gifts. So did Nkosi Johnson, Mother Teresa, and Cesar Chavez. May your and my names be added to the list of ordinary people who shared the gift of themselves with the world in order to change it. We all are blessed with the “power of one.”

Peggy Clark lives in Chicago and is associate vice president for student development at DePaul University. She is currently completing a doctoral degree in higher education administration at Loyola University in Chicago.



Lake Forest Friends Meetinghouse in Lake Forest, Ill.

Simple Gifts

by Debbie Curren

'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free,
'Tis a gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
It will be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend, we shall not be ashamed.
To turn, turn will be our delight,
For in turning, turning we come round right.

"Simple Gifts," a Shaker hymn attributed to Elder Joseph Brackett of Alfred, Maine, 1848.

Like many Quakers, one of my favorite songs is "Simple Gifts." As a Quaker woman living in our contemporary American culture, I often ponder how I might gain this simplicity and be "in a place just right." I'm sure thoughts like these are not limited to Quakers or to women.

Many adults in our society feel as though they are searching daily to find love and delight in their lives. Many of us find ourselves filling our lives with acquisitions or busyness, only to discover that we don't feel satisfied or complete.

I employ a practice we Quakers have of asking ourselves questions about how we are conducting our lives. We do this both informally as individuals, and formally (called Queries) as a body of faith. Many of you, as spiritual individuals, may already make use of similar processes as you navigate the road of life. I'd like to take this opportunity to share with you some background about Quaker spiritual practice in general, and my own spiritual journey and life as a Quaker woman.

Quakers (the Religious Society of Friends) began in seventeenth-century England with George Fox, an earnest young seeker. He and others were not finding spiritual fulfillment and truth in the established

church of that day. Fox's search was fulfilled when he rediscovered a truth taught by Jesus that within each person is a part of the spirit of God, and God speaks directly to each seeker. Quakers are referring to this divine presence when we speak of the "Christ within," the "Inner Light," or the "Holy Spirit." Because of the light within, each person can find and speak to God without the help of a priest or minister.

Friends' approach to worship is free from both ritual and dogma. Worship begins as we enter the Meeting and join in silent meditation, seeking to reach a deeper level of awareness and devotion. From this level, anyone present may find some insight to share with the Meeting. In waiting, in listening, and in speaking, what matters is that each person be sensitive to the "Inner Light" that acts as his or her guide.

The Religious Society of Friends does not have an official creed (or statement of beliefs) that all its members must accept. Quaker testimonies are not separate beliefs; they are a result or expression of our relationship with God. The traditional testimonies of peace, equality, service, simplicity, and community are a supportive foundation for a God-centered life. Practicing these testimonies gives focus to our thoughts and our actions, freeing us to be led by the Spirit.

I am a member of a Friends' Meeting that practices community through worship and fellowship.

We have a potluck after Meeting for Worship on one Sunday each month. Everyone—including visitors—is welcomed to our fellowship. At the seasonal times of Thanksgiving and Easter, we invite Friends from smaller meetings to share our meals. We practice simplicity with a potluck meal brought by those who are able. We share the clean-up responsibility on a voluntary sign-up basis.

We also have smaller groups who gather for a simple supper potluck in each other's homes monthly. Some members participate in quilting or other handicraft work together. Several times during the year, people participate in "Work Day" at the Meetinghouse to perform necessary maintenance tasks. Another event that I was able to participate in during the past year involved a weekend retreat. The purpose of this retreat was for adult members to come together and write our personal affirmations. Since members of our meeting are widespread geographically, these opportunities for fellowship help strengthen our religious community by bringing us together for common purpose.

As an individual, a Quaker, an employee, and a single mother of a teenager, I continually desire to practice these testimonies in my everyday life. I want to make decisions and choices that promote or enhance peace, equality, service, simplicity, and community. I want to

Inside the Meetinghouse.



be in a “place just right.” But I find that life is often complicated, much is unpredictable, and perfection is not reality. The big issue is that I am not in control.

One of my personal affirmations of what it means to me to be a Quaker is that we encourage awareness of reality in our world and acceptance of our relationship with our world, followed by action as an expression of our faith to the world. As I become aware of how my choices to acquire or do something affect my spirit and the lives of others in the world, I begin to hear the inner voice directing me to both outer and inner simplicity. My actions can begin to manifest this attention to the spirit within. It is a continuing process that I picture as a spiral. I go around and around my center, focusing inward, moving upward.

When the winter holiday season arrives, it is an opportunity to practice simplicity. Some of my

When the winter holiday season arrives, it is an opportunity to practice simplicity.

personal and family traditions have developed with simplicity and community in mind. Here are a couple of examples.

During Advent, I use a special booklet of daily Bible readings and meditations. This booklet was created by members of my family of faith (Presbyterian) where I lived in 1988. In this booklet, people shared spiritual reflections on holiday traditions and memories. Each year, I not only have a special guide through the wonders of Advent and Christmas, but also memories of special people and the supportive community that I found there.

Each year, we like to cut a fresh tree to have inside our house. The tree farm we visit is owned by a Quaker family. They limit the days available to cut



A practice of simplicity.

trees, so we plan our visit for the last Sunday afternoon before Christmas Day. It is a multi-sensory experience. Usually, we take a walk through the snowy acres of trees and catch a ride back on the hay wagon with our personally selected and hand-cut tree. There is a friendly warming shed where we rest, sip chocolate, buy homemade treats, and look at the nature exhibits. We drive home in the beautiful winter sunset glow and set up the tree with tiny lights. A dark, quiet room with only the light from our fragrant tree is one of my favorite setting for reflection and meditation.

I share these examples not as citations of how well I can practice the testimonies of simplicity and community in my holiday traditions, but as a way of sharing my spiritual journey with others in a Christian community. It is with a hope that “to turn, turn will be our delight, for in turning, turning we’ll come round right.”

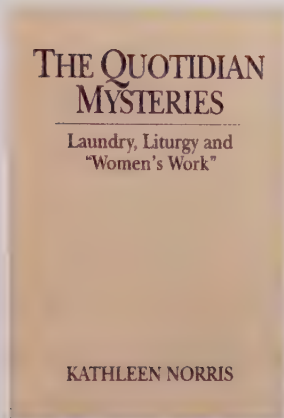
Debbie J. Curren is a member of the Lake Forest Friends Meeting, Lake Forest, Ill. She lives with her teenage son in Waukegan, Ill.



BOOKMARKS

Finding Transformation in the Ordinary

by Linda Post Bushkofsky



The Quotidian Mysteries, Kathleen Norris. Paulist Press, 1998.

There are many books out there that explore prayer. Some are best enjoyed alone, taken away to your quiet place. Others are meant to be shared with friends as together you explore what it means to lead a prayerful existence in the midst of all the ordinariness of life.

The Quotidian Mysteries fits both categories. Set aside some time during this Advent season to reflect upon the book's basic premise: that it is in the routine and the everyday that we find the transforming presence of God.

This little-known book by popular writer Kathleen Norris is the text of her 1998 Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality, sponsored by the Center for Spirituality at Saint Mary's College (Notre Dame,

Indiana). In less than 100 pages, Norris explores laundry, liturgy, and women's work, explaining how our daily (that is, quotidian) tasks can bring us to the core of our salvation and open us to the transforming presence of God. The divine encounters she explores in this work occur while walking, baking bread, and hanging out the laundry.

She challenges the reader to begin with the everyday, the commonplace, to observe the holy encounters that are present there. This brief but profound piece reminds us that the Christian faith "asks us to acknowledge that to shortchange these quotidian gifts is to reject God's incarnation in Jesus Christ."

Norris challenges us to look for blessings in unlikely, everyday places. Where are your unlikely, everyday places? What are the blessings you have found there?

Norris describes worship as our primary theology, "the fertile ground out of which our poems and stories, our theories and ideas . . . can grow." How has worship been a fertile ground for you? For your congregation?

Linda Post Bushkofsky serves as associate synod executive for communication and interpretation for the Synod of Lakes and Prairies, PC (USA). She is a member of Edina Community Lutheran Church in Edina, Minn.



MOTHERING SEASONS

Does It Feel like Christmas?

by Kirsi Stjerna

IN CREATING OUR OWN CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS, WE HAVE TRIED TO FIND WAYS TO EMPHASIZE THE JOYS OF GIVING AND SHARING IN WAYS BESIDES EXHAUSTING OURSELVES (AND OUR WALLETS) WITH A HOLIDAY SHOPPING FRENZY. TEACHING OUR children about the simplicity and generosity manifest in the Christmas story is a gift that will continue to grace their lives after all the other gifts are opened, used, and dumped. At Christmas with extended family and friends, we have struggled to help our children avoid comparing how many toys they got with how many others received. And still, the abundance of gifts by our tree on Christmas Eve is overwhelming—and embarrassing.

My husband loves to tell a story of when his mother sent him to deliver a surprise Christmas basket to a family in need. He will never forget the look in the children's faces as they received the Christmas basket, never to know from whom it came. Christmas experiences like that, I'm sure, have molded my husband's giving spirit, something he is imprinting onto our children by his constant acts of giving.

I particularly remember one soggy December day when he returned from work with his shoes lined with old newspaper; his wool socks were warming the feet of a man living on the streets. No wonder his daughter has been known to give away her new Pocahontas Barbie. Talk about Christmas

spirit! That innocent, genuine generosity in our children deserves to be fostered more than their other, more selfish tendencies. She already knows the joy of giving, and she knows how Christmas feels, whether in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, or Juva, Finland.

Every Christmas, our Cape Cod grandma makes dozens of cookies, we all watch the family video, the cousins read the Christmas story, we go to evening worship, and we wake up (way too early for grownups) to open the gifts. With the Finnish “mummu” we bake the ham, tarts, and casseroles. On Christmas Eve we decorate the tree, go to sauna, and open the gifts, and on Christmas morning we dash through the snow to the church (way too early for the children). Several things are a must in both Christmases: the tree, the lights, the food, the worship, the togetherness, the something to give and to receive. The Christmas spirit.

It's that time to year again, to invoke the Christmas spirit around us. And as we follow our traditions, our children take it all in, watching, listening, tasting, feeling. They learn to expect what Christmas means, and they learn how Christmas feels.

Kirsi Stjerna is assistant professor of Reformation church history, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. She is a member of Christ Lutheran at Gettysburg, Penn.



I bought Ewey at the airport as I was waiting impatiently for my plane. A batch of new Beanie Babies had just been dumped into a bin at a nearby shop. I rushed over, joining others in the hunt. Just as someone else reached out to grab it, I snagged the lamb—Ewey—for my teen-age daughter.

Two weeks later, I was explaining to a group of people the connection between hunger in God's world and our individual and national patterns of spending, acquiring, and consuming. I described how hundreds of millions of people survive on one dollar a day—seven dollars a week. Suddenly, the words caught in my throat as an “instant replay” ran in my mind: There I was, jostling at the Beanie Baby bin, slapping down \$7 for Ewey. I had been so caught up in the frenzy I didn't even think about what I was doing.

A Beanie's Tale

by Lita Brusick Johnson

IN THE MIDST OF THIS
FRANTIC HOLIDAY
SHOPPING SEASON,
I REMEMBER AN
ADVENT LESSON
I LEARNED FROM
A BEANIE BABY
LAMB CALLED EWEY.

Holiday advertising urges us to buy more and buy bigger to guarantee a picture-perfect Christmas morning. As those ads intensify during this season, Ewey reminds me to turn down the volume and think about why I buy and give.

Ewey also reminds me that all gifts send messages—intentional and unintentional! My daughter has so many Beanie Babies. When I gave her one more, I unthinkingly amplified commercial society's relentless message, a message that conflicts with my values: gathering more things makes life worthwhile. When I later asked her if I could take Ewey to my office, she looked around her room and replied, “I don't have a Beanie Baby lamb, do I?”

So what's at issue? Not Ewey or Beanie Babies in themselves! The issue is about me: the choices I make when I interact with Beanies and all

the good gifts of God's creation. What's at issue is how I steward the money God entrusted to me—and how I live out faith in daily life.

With my daughter's permission, Ewey now sits on top of my bookcase—a reminder of how easy it is to “go with the flow” of unthinking spending and acquiring. For the goal of Christmas giving is not to echo society's message that more and bigger is better. Rather, Christmas gift giving should reflect in small, human-size ways the gift of God's love in Bethlehem's manger. And so, along with Ewey, I keep in mind the gifts given and received that express love in genuine, often simple ways that help us know that we are known and loved by others, even as God knows and loves us.

I also remember the example of people like Mary and Howie Wennes who give Christmas gifts that encourage their grandchildren in the paths of faith. From their earliest years, each Wennes grandchild received a special “gift” from their grandparents—a cow in Senegal, a pig in Haiti, or perhaps a batch of silkworms in Bangladesh. Now that they are older, they sit with Mary and pick out their gift to the World Hunger Appeal—a gift that helps another family get enough to eat. The children also have great fun turning the tables. Howie's whole family pitched in and gave him an adobe house—one that would be rebuilt for a poor family after Hurricane Mitch!

Christmas shopping is about choices, large and small. And so I can almost hear Ewey, from her bookcase perch, giving me this holiday shopping advice: “Stop, look, and listen!”

STOP. Take a deep breath. Think about your place in God's good creation and give thanks! Balance wants against needs—for you, for those who will receive your gift, and for your local and global neighbors. Plan ahead so you can use your money wisely.

LOOK. Really look at what you are about to buy. Why are you buying it? What is its value in comparison with other things you could do with that money? Is there an alternative gift you could choose that would better express your love—and the Christ-centered values that shape your life?

LISTEN. Listen to the message you are sending with this gift and make sure that it is what you want to say to friends, spouse, children, and grandchildren. And listen to Jesus, who helps us understand that life does not consist in the “abundance of [our] possessions” (Luke 12:15).

God grant us grace to buy and give wisely this season, secure in the hope and joy that is part of the abundant life the Child of Bethlehem brings!

Lita Brusick Johnson is director of the ELCA World Hunger Appeal.

GIVE A CHRISTMAS GIFT THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE—from 10 chickens for a family in need in Bolivia to a year's schooling for an AIDS orphan in Africa! Call 800-638-3522 ext. 2764 (or visit www.elca.org/hunger) to get the new ELCA World Hunger Alternative Giving Ideas Catalogue. Or send a check to Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631, with the notation ELCA World Hunger Appeal. Let your loved ones know that a gift in their honor is helping hungry people throughout God's world.

Express your values through what you buy. Give artisans in developing countries a fair price for their work by buying “fairly traded” crafts. Call Lutheran World Relief at 800-LWR-LWR2 for a catalogue.



IDEANET

Testimonies and Celebrations

IN THIS ISSUE WE HEAR FROM SOMEONE WHO ATTENDED THE LAST TRIENNIAL GATHERING AND FROM OTHERS WHO HAVE GREAT IDEAS. WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO SHARE YOUR OWN THOUGHTS AND IDEAS—REFER TO PAGE 43 FOR TOPICS AND DEADLINES.

Triennial Testimony

I attended my first Triennial in 1999. As a first-time attendee and delegate, I was not sure what to expect. The Women of Color Gathering turned out to be the most spirit-filled event I've ever witnessed. I was teamed up with a wonderful roommate, and we shared stories of our journey of faith through tears, laughter, singing, and prayer.

As a delegate I expected to vote in the elections and listen to the speakers. But I never thought that I would assist in writing a resolution or be nominated to the Executive Board my first time out! In fact, my enthusiasm has sparked interest in my local congregation. With the 2002 Triennial in nearby Philly, I plan to bring members of my unit, all of whom will be attending for the first time.

Susan Alston-McRae—Jersey City, New Jersey
Trinity Women of the ELCA

Surprise—150 Attend!

The Mother/Daughter Banquet at St. John Lutheran Church in Robstown, Texas, on May 12 was an

overwhelming success. Instead of the 50 to 75 people expected, 150 attended.

The program included the display and modeling of wedding attire. The Fellowship Hall and tables were decorated, casseroles and salads were enjoyed, and men served, cleaned up, and were ready to help with anything else that was needed.

Women of St. John Lutheran Church—Robstown, Texas

Tea Parties Are Great

Our Women of the ELCA hosted a Garden Tea Party in honor of all members over the age of 70 in recognition of their years of service and faithfulness to the church.

Guests entered the fellowship hall through an arbor surrounded by pots of live flowers and vines. Flowers decorated the entire hall. A bulletin board of photos depicting women of the church working at past events was placed at the front of the hall. The tables for the honorees and other guests were set very elegantly with fine china. The centerpieces were teapots and miniature birdhouses. Each honoree selected an item to take home as a memento of the occasion. A short program was held including inspirational messages, special music, and a time for memories and sharing.

Judy Ringdahl—Cogswell, North Dakota
Nazareth Lutheran Church



UNTRADITIONAL TRADITIONS?

by Linda Johnson Seyenkulo

Holiday traditions in my childhood were very predictable. Each Christmas Eve we had the same food, served on the same dishes, and in the same order. This was followed by singing Christmas carols at the piano and then opening gifts, one at a time, by the whole family. We ended the evening with a late-night candlelight service at church. The next day was pretty quiet and unstructured.

New Year's Eve was a time to tell everyone how you were going to improve yourself the next year (the yearly resolutions) and to watch the ball at New York's Times Square make its descent at midnight.

It was important to have those traditions. The experiences we have with traditions help shape who we are and who we will be. They give us something on which to hang the important things of our lives. It

was difficult to imagine Christmas and New Year's done any other way.

Those were meaningful traditions for us, but lives change. When that happens, traditions have to change. Through the years, some of those same traditions have stayed with my family and me, but others have been replaced or modified. Friends, acquaintances, and new family members have

brought ideas that make the holidays just as meaningful and sometimes even more so than before.

From faith traditions like Islam and some Christian traditions comes the idea of constant prayer as a regular part of life. That witness of the importance of prayer has led me to view Advent as a time of prayerful preparation for the coming of the Christ child. That's quite a change from the childlike preparations of "What am I going to get?" or "What am I going to give?" that used to haunt my life. It is life-changing to say, "Only 23 praying days until Christmas!" The whole focus of Christmas changes from a materialistic emphasis to a Christ-child emphasis.

The Passover storytelling ritual with the child asking, "Why is this night different from all others?" is a Jewish tradition that tells the story of the Jewish people. The Christian Christmas and Epiphany are full of wonderful storytelling possibilities that can become a part of family or personal devotion. The possibilities for making this an intensely personal, faith-building experience are endless.

In some cultures, the start of a new year is a time to honor relationships. In our home, we share with each other one thing we would like for each person to improve and we are most thankful for in each person.

Adults and children alike light up as they hear from the people closest to them what is really great about them. We often spend the next year trying to improve on the problem areas. Another modification of this same practice is to begin during the holiday season a daily household habit of giving thanks for what you are most thankful for and of telling God what you are least thankful for. It raises awareness not only of the gifts we have been given, but also of our responses to God. This heightened awareness can lead to a deeper relationship with God and each other.

We live in a society where people often live apart from their families. Christmas is a great time to host a dinner in your home or church. Make it a community dinner where everyone is welcome. Streamline the work by inviting others to bring food for the meal, or make it a church-wide project. It becomes a Christ-centered meal when you look around the table and realize, "These are not the people I usually hang out with." And then you think, "This is really great!" Changing traditions during Christmas and New Year's feels risky, I know. That is precisely why traditions need to change. You see, those traditions that give us something to hang the things of our faith on can easily become mistaken for the faith. The way we celebrate Christmas can become what we think Christmas is all about. When that happens we are worshiping the tradition rather than using the tradition to help us worship God. Christmas is about the birth of baby Jesus, God become flesh to live among us. The purpose of our traditions is to help us to see and understand just that. The important thing about the holidays—

That witness of the importance of prayer has led me to view Advent as a time of prayerful preparation for the coming of the Christ child.

Christmas and New Year's especially—is not so much the traditions that shape them, but how those traditions help us to grow as people of faith. Take some time this year to do something new in the tradition line. Use one of the suggestions here or come up with your own. It doesn't matter. What does matter is that the holiday season becomes a time of spiritual refreshment for you and yours.

Linda Johnson Seyenkulo is a pastor at Zion Lutheran Church in Stony Island, Ill.



Connections in Time

by Debbie Trafton O'Neal

I'm sure you've heard the story about the new bride who decided to bake a ham for dinner. Before she put the ham in the pan, she cut off the ends. When her husband asked her why she did that, she said, "Well, that's what my mom always did before she cooked a ham." The next time they saw her mom, the young woman asked her about it. "I always cut the ends of the ham off because my mom did," said the mom. So the two women went to the grandma to ask her why she always cut the ends off the ham. "Why, I always cut the ends off the ham because my pan was too small!"

Traditions. Every family has them, whether they recognize them or not. Sometimes traditions are meaningful and good. Sometimes they are neither meaningful nor even necessary. Traditions can be planned, anticipated, and savored, and they can also be spontaneous "Aha!" moments that capture everyone's attention and imagination. Still other traditions are those that ebb and flow, molded by the events in our lives and in the world around us.

As the world continues to change at a rapid pace, it is important for us to have traditions and rituals as a framework for our lives. Without a doubt, technology has increased the pace of our lives, and we grow weary just trying to keep up. But in the midst

of our daily lives, our personal and family traditions can be a touchstone that keeps us grounded and in touch with who we really are. Traditions and rituals connect us to yesterday, keep us in touch with today, and give us hope for tomorrow.

In a world of change, traditions are predictable and offer us a sense of belonging. Creating new traditions and keeping the old (maybe even with a slight modification or two) builds our families up and unites them in fun and meaningful ways.

A sense of belonging is something that everyone longs to feel. Kids who change schools, adults who move with career changes, and older relatives who

Volunteering: A tradition of sharing and caring

Time. We'd all like to have more of it. More time to relax, more time to enjoy life, more time to spend with the people we love. When we wish for more time, do we ever stop to think that God gives each of us the same amount of time in our day, but then gives us the choice of how we spend that time?

All of the organizational books, lectures, and time-management systems in the world can't help you have more time in your day. What they can do is help you figure out the best ways to spend the time that you do have.

One of the most rewarding ways to spend time is by volunteering (see the November issue of *LWT*, p. 28–30). Have you ever stopped to think about all the programs and organizations in our world that couldn't function without volunteers? Food banks, nursing homes, classrooms, hospital gift shops, churches—the list goes on indefinitely. The power of one person is truly an incredible thing. Like a single drop of water into a still pool, the effects of your actions have the ability to affect many.

For some families, the tradition of volunteering is as natural as breathing. As parents and grandparents introduce their children to volunteer opportunities, the gift of sharing time becomes a fulfilling habit that lasts a lifetime. Have you and your family thought about a tradition of volunteering? What about pulling out the calendar and marking days that you commit to as a family to volunteering? Giving of yourself may be one of the best traditions you ever start with your family. It also might be the best gift someone else receives.

move from a home of their own to a retirement home or care facility feel the same. Traditions and rituals are things to look forward to, some things that don't change as everything else around us seems to—and these are only a few of the underlying reasons for establishing and maintaining traditions in your life.

What traditions do you have? Are they holiday or birthday celebrations? Does your family have a family joke that everyone loves to remember? Is it putting your tent up in the same spot for every camping vacation? Stopping for Sunday brunch after church each week? Picking apples in autumn and pressing them into cider? Or the first swim of the

year in a local lake? Or is your family tradition as simple as the table prayer you use before meals?

Tradition can be anything that connects people together for a special moment in time. Sometimes that moment is brief and unplanned. Enjoy those moments. But make sure to plan and look forward to the longer moments when your family's past, present, and future are joined together as you celebrate.

Debbie Trafton O'Neal is an author, educator, and consultant for families and children. Her latest book, published by Augsburg Fortress, is *The Family Hand-Me-Down Book: Creating and Preserving Family Traditions*.

2

Sunday

One candle burns in the Advent wreath, one small flame against the winter darkness. This is the season in which we proclaim, in bold opposition to what the world around us presents, that light is coming. Light has come. Light is coming.

3

Monday

In Matthew 9:27–31, Jesus heals two people who are blind. The story reminds us that the light we long for is the light of Christ, a true gift freely given.

4

Tuesday

We wait for Christmas in a world that does not. Keep Advent, and consider how this waiting is a reminder of the other ways our faith calls us to act in ways that are out of sync with the world.

5

Wednesday

Mary's song of praise, the Magnificat, is found in Luke 1:46–55. Spend time in quiet reflection on this text, or listen to a musical setting of it.

6

Thursday

The Advent mystery is the beginning of the end of all in us that is not yet Christ.

(Thomas Merton)

7

Friday

To gather with others, to invite guests or be a guest, is to come into the presence of Christ. We welcome Christ in our welcome of one another.

8

Saturday

During Advent we clean and decorate for Christmas. We set our house in order for Christ so that, as the English poet Robert Herrick reminds us, we "grant him the nobler part of all the house; the best of all's the heart."

9

Sunday

Each of us has spiritual gifts, which never become outdated and are always useful. How are you sharing your spiritual gifts this year?

10

Monday

The Magi journeyed to Bethlehem from afar. As you set up your crèche this year—especially if you have children—put the Magi in a far corner of the room. Every few days, move

11

Tuesday

Surprise someone with an unexpected, delightful gift.

12

Wednesday

In 1 Corinthians 12:27–13:3, Paul cautions us about trying to do too much at once.

13

Thursday

See! The Lord shall appear, shall not deceive us. If the Lord tarries, keep watching. The Lord shall come quickly. Alleluia.

(Monastic liturgy)

14

Friday

The trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem was not an easy one. The Holy Family and their fellow travelers relied on one another, and so do we. Christ is born in the midst of strangers showing kindness toward one another.

15

Saturday

Advent is to be a quiet season of waiting. In a culture that keeps "the holidays," this is nearly impossible. Take time to go for a walk, read a book, take a nap. Revel in thoughtful, quiet solitude.

16

Sunday

These are the shortest days of the year. Many of us wake before it is light out. Take a few minutes each morning to watch the transformation of darkness turning to light.

17

Monday

The long nights and accumulated memories of the season can bring remembrances of the dead. Instead of chasing away our memories of the dead, in memory and in spirit invite all the communion of saints to keep the season with us.

18

Tuesday

The glory of God is a living person and the life of each living person is the vision of God.
(Ireneaus of Lyons, second century)

19

Wednesday

Mistletoe, for the ancient Scandinavians, was called Allheal and revered as the plant beneath which enemies were reconciled.

20

Thursday

In 2 Corinthians 9:7, we learn that God loves a cheerful giver. Remember to be a cheerful receiver as well.

21

Friday

Behold, I am coming soon.
(Revelation 22:12)

22

Saturday

Psalm 96 tells us to "Sing to the Lord a new song!" Get some friends together and go caroling, in your neighborhood, at the local nursing home, or at a nearby hospital.

23

Sunday

The Lord is coming; run out then shouting: Greatest of all, rule forever! Our strong God, our prince of peace, alleluia!
(Monastic liturgy)

24

Monday

O come, O come, Emmanuel
O come, O come,
great Lord of might
O come, strong branch of Jesse
O come, blest dayspring
O come, Key of David, come

25

Tuesday Christmas Day

We do not pray that your birth according to the flesh shall be renewed as it once occurred upon this day. Rather do we pray that your invisible Godhead may be grafted into us. . . .
Go not forth from us; spring forth rather from within us.
(Mozarabic rite)



Women
and

AIDS

A Global Perspective

by Mary Zentner

"WOMEN CONTINUE TO MAKE STRIDES TOWARDS EQUALITY WITH MEN.

Wherever they are educated, able to generate income, and enjoy equal protection under the law, they are in a position to have some control over their economic, social and personal life. But for millions of women, these goals are still remote. These are the women who are the most vulnerable to infection with HIV, the virus that results in AIDS."

(Women and AIDS: UNAIDS Point of View, October, 1997)

IT SEEMS AS THOUGH new AIDS statistics and reports come my way weekly. In one respect, that is how it should be, since I work on collecting information for the ELCA's HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse. In another sense, it can easily become overwhelming as I try to comprehend the magnitude of what is happening to so many lives—the lives of brothers and sisters around the world.

As a woman, I am deeply affected by what I read about women and AIDS in the world. It is not encouraging. Forty-five percent of the 36.1 million people living with HIV/AIDS are women. That's the big picture. In sub-Saharan Africa, there are at least

six women with HIV for every five men. Nearly 80 percent of all infected women are African.

How do we make sense of all the AIDS information? What if we tried to imagine a woman in Africa who is seeing the pandemic approaching her family? Let's try stepping into her shoes for a minute.

IMAGINING

Imagine that you are a woman about 25 years of age, living in a small town in a country in sub-Saharan Africa. You are married and have several children. You are faithful to your husband. You and your husband both work hard to provide the basics for your

family. Your husband sometimes travels to other areas to find temporary work to supplement the family's meager income.

You have noticed in the past year or two that there are more and more people getting sick in your area. Almost every week there is at least one funeral at the closest Lutheran church. People whisper about what is happening. No one wants to say the name AIDS, yet everyone knows that AIDS has come to your town. You are afraid. How does someone get AIDS? What will happen to your children if either you or your husband gets AIDS and dies?

Someone comes to your church to talk about AIDS. A group of women gather to learn more about it. You learn that as a woman you are more vulnerable to being infected with HIV. You realize that you must have missed learning about your reproductive system, because as a girl, you were taken out of school earlier than your brothers.

The leader of the group discussion encourages all the women to talk with their partners about mutual faithfulness and using condoms. There is an immediate buzz among the women. Your heart begins to pound. How could you bring up the topic of sex with your husband? You were taught to let the man take the initiative and make the decisions about sex. Oh, no, there's more! The leader is talking about how men who travel for work often use prostitutes away from home. Does your husband do that? Has he been infected? You could never ask him! If you ask him, he would know that you don't trust him. What if he got really angry? What if he beat you? What if he abandoned the family? With limited education and job skills, how could you make it alone?

How was your journey with your sister in sub-Saharan Africa? Does she experience any of the same challenges and fears that women in other parts of the world, including the United States, experience? AIDS

prevention campaigns often fail women by assuming that they are at low risk or by urging prevention methods that women have little or no power to apply, such as condom use, abstinence, and mutual fidelity. It can be a very tough situation.

TAKING ACTION

What can we all do to help fight HIV infection in women around the world? We can challenge the silence and be advocates for justice for women around the world. We can pray for the women of the world, and we can pray for change. Advocating for more education for girls, improved health care and HIV prevention education, economic independence programs, overcoming violence to women, development of female-controlled HIV prevention methods, and ending the silence on HIV and sexuality issues would greatly increase the potential for HIV prevention for women around the world.

The ELCA is an active partner in the Stand With Africa campaign. The campaign supports programs such as HIV prevention education, training HIV educators, and working with AIDS orphans and widows so they can take care of themselves. For more information about the ELCA's involvement with the Stand With Africa campaign, visit their website at www.elca.org/hunger/StandWithAfrica.html.

For more information about HIV/AIDS in the world, visit hivinsite.ucsf.edu/InSite on the web. A second site (unaids.org) is also quite good. While at unaids.org, you may find the October 1997 Women and AIDS Best Practice-Point of View of particular interest (access it at unaids/publications/documents/human/index.html#gender).

Mary Zentner is coordinator for the ELCA's HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse and Speakers Bureau. She also writes education resources.

FRIEDA (NOT HER REAL NAME) TESTED POSITIVE FOR HIV IN 1990; she had not expected to contract HIV and was unaware that a prior boyfriend had put her at risk for the disease. Since 1990, Frieda has gone on to meet and marry a man who is HIV-negative. She has also given birth to two children who are HIV-negative (new antiviral drugs have greatly reduced the risk of spreading HIV to one's unborn child). Frieda is alive and well today and has become a leading advocate for women with HIV. In the United States there are thousands of women like Frieda, living with HIV/AIDS.



The Face of AIDS in the U.S. by Kate Sprutta Elliott

THIS YEAR MARKS THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY of the first reported AIDS cases in the United States. For many, this anniversary may not have a great emotional impact. We may believe we've only known of people with HIV/AIDS through the media. But for some, this anniversary is bitter with the heartache of having lost colleagues, friends, and family members to AIDS. Some of us currently are living with HIV/AIDS or have people close to us who are struggling with the disease. And some of us may be at risk of infection even now. AIDS has not gone away.

THE BASIC FACTS

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. A person can be infected with HIV and feel healthy for many years. But HIV makes people sick slowly by destroying their immune systems. When the person

is no longer protected by their immune system, this stage of HIV infection is known as AIDS, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. AIDS cases are reported to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), which tracks the spread of the disease. There are now treatments that can slow or stop HIV from reproducing in a person's body, but once someone is infected with HIV, there is no way to get rid of it.

HIV is only spread by four body fluids: semen, blood, vaginal secretions, and breast milk, passing from one infected person's body into another. The most common ways are through unprotected sex, sharing injection needles, and from mother to baby.

HIV/AIDS IN THE U.S.

The CDC estimates that 800,000 to 900,000 U.S. residents are living with HIV infection—and one-third

of them don't know it. Approximately 40,000 new HIV infections occur each year in the U.S. In the U.S., 774,467 cases of AIDS had been reported to the CDC through December 31, 2000. As of that date, some 448,060 deaths among people with AIDS had been reported. AIDS is now the fifth leading cause of death in the United States among people 25 to 44.

HIV/AIDS IN WOMEN

Women do get HIV/AIDS. In spite of this, most women do not believe that they could be at risk. Of the new infections among women, the CDC estimates that about 75 percent were infected through heterosexual sex, and the rest from injection drug use. As of June 2000, 124,911 adolescent and adult women in the United States were reported as having AIDS. Women of color are especially hard-hit. Younger women are also at special risk. In 1999, more than 8,000 new cases of AIDS were reported in women between 13 and 24, and nearly 7,000 new cases were reported in women between 24 and 29.

But it's not just young people: More than 10 percent of all new AIDS cases in the United States occur in people over 50. Yet there is a common misperception that older adults are not at risk. The reality is that some do have unprotected sex or use injection drugs.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The statistics are alarming, but to most of us, feel unreal. For a woman to find out she is HIV-infected is more than a medical crisis. It is also an emotional crisis, as she deals with questions about her future, her relationships, her health, her children, her job, and her spiritual life. It's also a financial crisis—treatments for HIV are expensive, and she may be unable to work if she has difficult medical conditions. She may be afraid to tell the people in her life that she's infected, and she may become depressed and

ashamed. There is a very human cost behind every case counted in the statistics.

HIV/AIDS in the United States is a social justice issue, since the growing edge of infection is among people of color. Women and children living in poverty are especially vulnerable, since they may not have access to health care and medications, and they have fewer resources and support networks to help them stay well.



But it's not just young people: More than 10 percent of all new AIDS cases in the United States occur in people over 50. Yet there is a common misperception that older adults are not at risk.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

As women of faith, here are some ways we can support those living with HIV/AIDS and advocate for them:

- Talk to the young people in your life. Give them a chance to talk to you about what's going on in their lives, and when the opportunity presents itself, talk to them about the danger of HIV infection. There are resources for helping youth learn about HIV on the ELCA website (elca.org/dcs/youth.html), or

check out the ELCA Youth Ministries help sheet on the topic of HIV/AIDS. It provides information about the virus, suggestions for talking about it, ideas for action, and related resources. This help sheet is available from the Division for Congregational Ministries/Youth Ministries at 800-638-3522, ext. 2432, or go to elca.org/dcm/youth/resource/helpsheets/aids.html

- Become educated. Much of the information in this article came from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at cdcnpin.org, the ELCA website at elca.org/dcs/hiv/aids.html, and the WORLD (Women Organized to Respond to Life-threatening Diseases) newsletter (telephone 510-986-0340).



- Pray, and remember those with HIV/AIDS aloud in your circle or congregation, especially on World AIDS Day, December 1. The ELCA has several worship and prayer resources at elca.org/dcs/worship.html. Or call the ELCA AIDS Clearinghouse at 800-638-3522, ext. 2797.

- Find out about AIDS in your community. Check out local social service agencies to see if you or your circle can make a contribution or assist by volunteering.

THE MINISTRY OF CARING

The ELCA Church Council issued a message on “AIDS and the Church’s Ministry of Caring” that said, in part: “AIDS, often with an intensity greater than many diseases, calls us to remember our common humanity. As a disease that affects women, men, and children around the world, it shows how closely we are bound together in relationships of mutual trust, need, and responsibility. The church’s ministry of caring is a grateful

Our calling summons us to compassion for, acceptance of, and service with people affected by AIDS both within and outside of our congregations

response to God’s caring for us. . . . Our calling summons us to compassion for, acceptance of, and service with people affected by AIDS both within and outside of our congregations. . . . This ministry of caring requires that we be well-informed about the nature of AIDS. Knowledgeable and sensitive Christians are needed to help counter the prejudice and injurious discrimination that people with AIDS experience.”

As women of faith, we can be those “wise and informed people” who help bring an end to AIDS. People like Frieda are counting on us. Twenty years is long enough.

Kate Sprutta Elliott is editor of *Seeds for the Parish*, the resource newspaper for leaders in the ELCA.

Second Family

Assisting Parents Living with AIDS

by Jo Ann Dollard

SECOND FAMILY, A PROGRAM OF LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES OF ILLINOIS (LSSI), brings strength, friendship, and support to HIV-positive and AIDS-affected birthparents in the Chicago area and to their children. LSSI recently opened another Second Family program to serve the Peoria, Illinois area.

Second Family exists to make day-to-day life easier for parents living with HIV and AIDS. Counseling, support groups, outings, and “legacy” activities are offered to the families, which are headed mostly by mothers. As its name implies, Second Family also helps parents find permanent, loving “second” (adoptive) families for their children. A full-time nurse consults with parents on general health issues and the grueling medication regimens that some undertake to boost their immunity.

Jeannie, 42, has been a part of Second Family since the program began in 1993. She found out she was HIV-positive 13 years ago, when her youngest daughter, Maggie, was only a year old. “This is the best agency and group I’ve ever been to,” she says.

Another participant, Barbara, a single parent, was diagnosed 10 years ago when she was six months pregnant and an intravenous (IV) drug user. After finding out she was HIV-positive, she underwent drug treatment and later found Second Family. Almost always, program participants like Jeannie and Barbara contract HIV through an infected partner or through IV drug use.

Second Family began nearly 10 years ago when projections of “AIDS orphans” started surfacing in the news. Recognizing the need for programs to provide services for families whose children might be left



without parents, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services granted \$150,000 to LSSI in 1992 to start Second Family. Private contributions make up half of the program’s modest budget.

The program has been so successful that in 1996, it received the Peter F. Drucker Award for Nonprofit Innovation. The honor recognized that not only did Second Family provide compassionate and high-quality services to an underserved group, it also saved the state of Illinois millions of dollars by keeping children out of the child welfare system.

Wade Ek, statewide coordinator of LSSI’s HIV Services, says that Second Family’s growing client list indicates that “The need for services remains. For families, that’s even more true.”

For more information on services or on how to become a “second family,” call 847-390-1498 (Chicago), 309-671-0300, ext. 264 (Peoria), or visit www.LSSI.org.

Jo Ann Dollard is Director of Communications and Public Relations at Lutheran Social Services of Illinois in Des Plaines, Ill.

Session 4

Praying against the Powers



by James Arne Nestingen

Study Text

Genesis 2:4–24; 3:1–7; Matthew 4:1–11

The Third Petition

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

What is this?

Answer: In fact, God's good and gracious will comes about without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may come about in and among us. (from Luther's *Small Catechism*)

How does this come about?

Answer: Whenever God breaks and hinders every evil scheme and will of the devil, the world, and our flesh that would not allow us to hallow God's name and would prevent the coming of his kingdom. And God's will comes about whenever God strengthens us and keeps us steadfast in his word and in faith until the end of our lives. This is God's gracious and good will. (from Luther's *Small Catechism*)

Memory Verse

"But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" (Genesis 3:4)

Overview

Opposition surfaces with the promise that God hears our prayers and speaks the word that gives us faith. So we pray, "Your will be done," asking God to overcome the powers that attack the word and our faith.

Opening

“Jesus sinners will receive. Even me he has forgiven; And when I this earth must leave, I shall find an open heaven. Dying, still to him I cleave—Jesus sinners will receive.” (“Jesus Sinners Will Receive,” *Lutheran Book of Worship* 291, verse 5)

The Voice of Temptation

God’s promises evoke opposition. As soon as we hear of the power of prayer, as soon as we hear of God’s self-expression in the word and the Holy Spirit’s work in our hearts, we ask, “Does it really work that way?” Looking around, going by everyday experience, this doesn’t always appear to be the case. There are other powers that have to be considered.

So the story of God’s creation as it is told in Genesis becomes a story of temptation and rebellion. And in the story from Matthew, Jesus is barely baptized before the devil is at him, seeking to break his faith.

How do we deal with the powers that move in such temptations? Thankfully, the good Lord does not hand that problem over to us but instead takes it on. So we have two of the most interesting stories in the Bible: first Eve and Adam, and then Jesus. Then finally we have the Third Petition, a real powerhouse.

1. **“It is never darker than before the dawn,” we say, or “I didn’t know how bad it was until I got better.” God’s goodness has a way of exposing the bad that stands against it. When we become aware of God’s promises and love, we also become aware of new temptations that arise. Can you describe a time in your life when God’s promise also exposed a temptation for you?**

Eve the Faithful

In the story of Adam and Eve, we have been led to believe that it is Eve who is the more susceptible of the two. In fact, as Genesis tells it, Eve is really the strong one. Martin Luther said that the serpent went after Eve because it knew Adam was no challenge—good for nothing more than lunch!

The story of Adam and Eve begins with God’s abounding goodness.

2. **Read Genesis 2:4–24. Tally up the gifts that God bestows on Adam and Eve. What are some of these?**
3. **Now read Genesis 3:1–7. As the Bible tells it, God sets limits on Adam and Eve. In what ways are Eve and Adam limited? What are the obvious ways? What are the not-so-obvious ways?**

Martin Luther thought that Eve’s conversation with the serpent indicates her faith—she trusts God completely, unaware of any danger. But the serpent is more than just crafty or clever; the serpent is truly deceitful. The serpent begins by attacking the meaning of God’s word.

4. **What do you think made this temptation alluring for Eve?**

What makes the serpent so difficult to deal with is the way he doubles the temptation. Hidden inside the outward temptation is an even deeper one, buried like a hook in bait. Eve and Adam were created to live by faith, looking to God for every good, counting on God in every time of difficulty.

5. In order to lure Eve from her faith, the serpent makes two false promises. What does the serpent say will happen if Eve eats the fruit? What will the effect of these promised consequences be for Eve's faith?

Jesus' Struggle with the Tempter

The story of Jesus' temptation comes right at the beginning of his ministry. As Jesus prepares to go to work, he seeks out John the Baptist to be baptized. Then the devil seeks out Jesus, finding him in the wilderness to put him to a threefold test. Jesus' temptation also follows upon the word and faith. After his baptism, there is a marvelous incident.

Read Matthew 3:16–17. Looking at the story of Jesus from the perspective of Easter, we often miss the limits he had to live with. Jesus was fully God, but he was limited by the fact that he was also fully human. He, like us, had to live by faith.

6. What did the announcement from heaven say to Jesus about his ministry? Tell what this might this have done for his faith.

Read Matthew 4:1–11. Once again, as in the story of Eve, the temptations are crafty. There is bait, an outward lure that is attractive, but fairly easy to deal with. The hook, the deeper temptation, is buried inside, demonically, where the ordinary eye can't see it.

7. According to the text, what are the three outward temptations that the devil offers Jesus?

The inner temptation in each of the three addresses is the same word that Jesus heard at his baptism. The first two begin with the

words "if you are the Son of God." That is, "if you really are what the voice said you are, then you should be able to do what I suggest." Directed at the word, the inner temptations are also an attack on Jesus' faith. In offering Jesus the chance to prove himself, the devil attempts to move Jesus away from his confidence in God's word.

There is no "if" in the third temptation; it is directed more at the shape of Jesus' ministry. If Jesus had accepted the third temptation, he would have gained what looked like the power of the resurrection without having to face rejection and death. But he would always have been the devil's underling.

8. In each of the inner temptations, Jesus refuses the devil with the words "It is written!" Faith clings to the word. Why do you suppose Jesus refers to the written word rather than to the voice he heard at his baptism?
9. In the second temptation, the devil quotes Scripture, using the word against the word. What is the devil trying to do with this ploy? How does Jesus counter it?

In his explanation of this petition, Martin Luther named the three sources of temptation commonly identified in the Bible. Fortunately, not everybody is as besieged by the devil as Jesus was. Still, as Luther observed, the devil can sniff out the faithful and so generally reserves his efforts for those who are deep in the word. The devil also attacks faith at fragile or decisive times, when faith is our only protection.

Besides the devil, the other two sources of temptation are the world and the sinful self.

“The world” is all humanity in rebellion and going its own way. The “old Adam” (or “old Eve”) is the sinful self in each of us. Whatever their immediate source, temptations have some common characteristics. They are deceitful, promising one thing but delivering another. In the end, like the devil’s temptations of Eve and Jesus, their goal is to undermine God’s word and our faith in it.

One example of a worldly temptation is overwork. Clearly, work is a good thing, one of the basic ways God enables us to serve our neighbors. However, the world promises that if we are really dedicated and put in that extra effort, we’ll be able to make it our oyster, and everything will be just right. In the end, though, all that overwork delivers is stress, exhaustion, and disappointment.

The temptations of the world and the sinful self are like the devil’s tempting. The world uses what is good to destroy what is right. So, for example, it is desirable to have a good reputation and enjoy the respect of others. But when seeking admiration becomes an obsession unto itself, the good becomes evil, as the word and faith are surrendered.

Personal temptations aren’t always that easy to resist, and the most destructive ones often can be very subtle. Usually we don’t become aware of how troublesome they are until after the fact, when we say things like, “I never intended it to turn out this way,” “I was only trying to do what was right,” or “I never dreamed this would happen.”

An example is trying to figure out “who you really are.” Certainly, it is good to know ourselves. But when temptation takes over, we become so desperately self-aware that it is impossible to see

beyond ourselves and we can become needy or self-centered. God’s word, faith, our neighbors, and everything outside ourselves gets set aside.

In the same way, one of the deepest personal temptations is being in control. Again, it is a good thing. Being able to accomplish purposes, to get things done, to arrange things the way they should be are all honorable intentions. But the good becomes evil when a person insists on being in control, when God, faith, and neighbors are all sacrificed for this purpose.

Hindering and Defeating

God deals with the powers of temptation by opposing them. In the words of an older translation of the catechism, God does this by “hindering and defeating them.” So God places impediments in the way or overcomes them altogether.

Usually there is a hindrance or a defeat built right into the temptations themselves. Just like Adam and Eve, or like Jesus before Easter, we have our limits. Work requires time to rest and recover. Likewise, there is only so much that we can learn about ourselves. Deluding us into thinking we can go beyond our limits, the temptation gets exposed when the limits refuse to yield. As Paul says in Romans 1, God lets us go—that is, God lets us taste the consequence—the inevitable hindrances and defeats.

One of the great stories of the way God hinders and defeats evil schemes is a biblical joke, the story of Babel (Genesis 11). The builders were going to invade heaven by constructing a great tower, stretching into the sky. They created a huge building, but they used bitumin—tar—for cement. All it took was a heat wave, and down it came.

Firming and Strengthening

God doesn't just deal with temptations negatively. Because we know God through Jesus Christ, we know there is no limit to God's love. So all the while God is hindering and defeating the forces of temptation, God is also at work in a positive way. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God keeps us "firm in the word" and "strengthens us in faith." Or as the Small Catechism puts it, the Holy Spirit keeps us "steadfast in the word and faith until our end."

Prayer Partners

The most important way God does this is through friends and neighbors in faith. Because the forces of temptation rely on craftiness or deceit, they can't stand in the light for long. And the lights come on when we talk the temptation over with a friend, when we are picked up and set back on our feet after a defeat. The friend, a sister or brother in the faith, can tell us where we get fooled.

But more than that, a Christian friend—a family member, a co-worker, a neighbor, or a member of our congregation—can speak God's word. "Your sin is forgiven," he or she can say, or "God drives away the demons and raises the dead!" "It is written!"

Either way, you've got a prayer partner or group you can turn to. How can you help one another with the powers of temptation?

Looking Ahead

In the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus moves us from matters of the word and faith to our bodies. There's nothing like having a little something to eat with your prayers. Again, the good Lord is a step ahead, already having set the table.

James Arne Nestingen is professor of church history at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

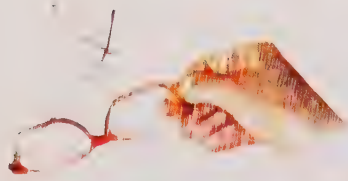
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COME VISIT US!

Do you enjoy spending time on the Internet? Have you checked out the Women of the ELCA and *Lutheran Woman Today* sites? Logging onto www.elca.org/wo at any time of the day or night allows you to easily access general information about Women of the ELCA. This is the entry point to finding out more about the organization, events, resources, Triennial Gathering 2002, and so much more.

Be certain to visit our web board (<http://webboard.elca.org:8080/~woboard>) to see what others are saying about *LWT* articles, Bible Study thoughts, and ideas. Many who log onto the site pose questions, offer reflections, or simply share what's on their mind. You can enjoy the comments of others or put in your own two cents! Either way, we think you'll enjoy this interactive site.

Finally, the *LWT* site (www.elca.org/wo/lwt) offers information on upcoming issues, current articles, and subscription information. Come visit today!



READER CALL

What Tempts You Most?

My husband occasionally threatens that my tombstone epitaph will read: “Here lies a woman who worried about today yesterday and who worried about tomorrow today.” I smile. He knows me well.

It’s difficult not to worry some days. Most days. When seemingly not enough paycheck encounters so many needs. When the memory of what I said or did, or didn’t say or didn’t do, revisits. When doubt about the path God has chosen for my life creeps in. When you (fill in the blank).

Giving way to the temptation to worry is all the invitation Satan needs to gain a foothold. I am trying to become more quickly attuned to the darkness of my worrying. It seems that once I allow worry to cloud one situation, worry blossoms and grows; one worry bumps into the next unknown that I might as well worry about too!

Not worrying means choosing not to worry. In Matthew 6:25–34, Jesus reminds us of the folly of our worry and chides that it will not add one iota of anything to our lives; God knows everything we need. God knows I can’t navigate on my own, worry-free; I need to acknowledge my weakness and the temptation to worry. Each and every time worry tempts, I must bring my worry to my Lord. Confess it. Leave it. And go, with the knowledge and peace that God provides. I smile: God knows me well.

Margaret J. Unruh—Flasher, North Dakota

The large columns reach far into the space above me. The glistening marble floor shines before me, beckoning me to enter this space. This is the place where many people often go to find peace and for a brief moment, a sense of completeness. No, it’s not a church—it’s the mall.

Even though I am somewhat embarrassed to share this, I know that there must be others who share this same, sometimes overwhelming, temptation. The overabundance of shiny new merchandise can lead some of us down a dangerous road known as “shopaholism.”

Don’t get me wrong. There isn’t anything wrong with purchasing new clothes or enjoying spending time in shopping venues. It’s just when I find myself constantly struggling against overspending or living beyond my means, I know I have issues. It’s not just that I sometimes lose control of my spending; I also struggle with the temptation to collect material items in an attempt to increase my perceived self worth. I know this is very destructive. It can destroy a person mentally and financially. When I realize that I am in this cycle, I know that am sinning against God’s will. How do I win? I have typed Luke 12:15 on a piece of paper and placed it inside my wallet. I find it really helps me to beat my temptation that I struggle with the most.

Julie Hoppe—St. Louis, Missouri



Bringing Good News to Women and Children

by Doris Streiter

WHAT IS THE TRIENNIAL GATHERING OFFERING? This is the monetary offering collected by Synodical Women's Organizations from Women of the ELCA units and individuals and presented at the Triennial Gathering 2002 during a worship service on Friday, July 12. (The Triennial Gathering will be held in Philadelphia July 8–14, 2002.) Through their offerings of time and money, Women of the ELCA participants have always supported global ministries with and for women and children. This Triennial Gathering offering will continue that tradition of support.

How will the 2002 Triennial Gathering offering be used to respond to God's call to serve others? As in the past, 50 percent of the offering will be directed to the churchwide organization in support of its commitment to building up the body of Christ. The other half will be distributed after the convention as grants to ELCA-endorsed international programs and projects that have been initiated by churches around the world in support of education, work skill development, and leadership empowerment for women.

How will this offering make a difference for women and children around the world? Projects supported by this offering are currently unfunded. We can make them happen! Through reports and updates on these projects during the triennium, we will be able to see the impact on the lives of women and children.

Our goal is \$400,000. This would allow us to commit \$200,000 for international ministries that support women and children. Together we will make a difference in the lives of women and children

across the globe—from Argentina to Zimbabwe, from Slovakia to Senegal—providing them with a chance to experience the abundant life that God wills for all of us.

The following are just some of the projects that will be funded by your gifts. Additional projects will be highlighted in the future.

\$10,000 will go toward each of the following:

- Support for two girls for one year in each of the five schools in Jordan that are run by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan.
- Support job skill training programs for women in Liberia, especially those affected by the civil war there, so that they can generate income for their families.
- Provide one year of financial support for women Bible school teachers, a seminary teacher, a chaplain, and evangelists in Madagascar who are not currently being paid for their services.

\$5,600 will sponsor a nurse promoting mother-child health and an organizer of women's savings groups in Bangladeshi villages for three years.

\$5,000 will go to each of the following:

- Support for teams of women in shantytown communities in Chile who serve as community health promoters, addressing issues ranging from HIV/AIDS to mental health and domestic violence.
- Street children ages 10 -14 in Argentina will be given the opportunity to learn basic vocational skills in sewing, woodworking and cooking so they can begin to find small work opportunities.
- Funding for one-year scholarships for tuition, room and board for five women students at Satya Wacana University in Indonesia.
- Providing English textbooks for two Lutheran schools in the Slovak Republic.
- Funding for one-year scholarships for ten young women attending Christian high schools in the Central African Republic so that families with little means can provide their daughters with a quality education.
- Assistance to Ethiopian street children, many of whom have lost their parents to HIV/AIDS, to continue their education.

- Providing women and children amputees who are victims of the civil war in Sierra Leone with educational opportunities and training in skills for income-generating projects.
- Support for HIV/AIDS education among young people in Zimbabwe, where it is estimated that a quarter of the population is HIV positive.

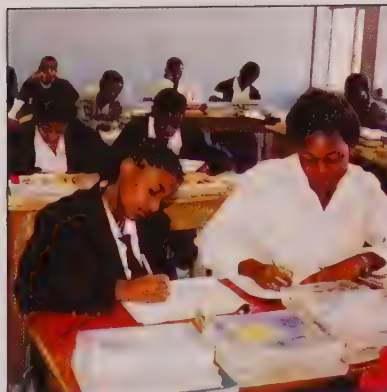
\$4,000 makes it possible for the Linguere Cultural Center in Senegal to empower women by teaching them sewing and other income-generating skills and to purchase books for literacy classes and for village libraries.

\$3,000 provides low-income women in India, many of whom are widows or single parents, with basic Christian education and training in handicrafts.

\$2,500 establishes a music scholarship fund at Makumira University College in Tanzania to cover the fees for music exams for 15 students per year for five years in order to provide trained musicians for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THIS OFFERING BY MAKING YOUR CHECK OUT TO WOMEN OF THE ELCA. Be sure to write "Triennial Gathering offering" on the memo line. You can send your check in one of two ways. First, you can send it to your synodical treasurer. She will write one check for all the contributions received. (If you need her name and address, call 800-638-3522, ext. 2730.) Synodical presidents will bring the checks forward during the offering on July 12. The second option is to send your check directly to the churchwide office: Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189. Either way, your contribution will be included as part of the Triennial Gathering offering and will be on its way to making a difference for so many.

WAR AND CONFLICT HAVE DEFINED THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE OF SUDAN FOR MANY YEARS. ALTHOUGH THE WAR IN SOUTHERN SUDAN HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY PAINFUL, VERY FEW PEOPLE IN THE WORLD EVEN KNOW ABOUT IT.



LONGING FOR THE GIFT OF PEACE

by Dr. Pauline Riak

THE WAR BROKE OUT IN 1956 just after the country gained independence from Great Britain the year before. The source of the conflict is hard to comprehend. It has centered on religious, race, and ethnic differences, and most recently on resources (after the discovery of huge oil deposits in the southern region).

It has led to the death of millions of people. Sudan also has the largest number of displaced people in the world. There are approximately 2.5 million people facing a serious food shortage, and thousands die every year from hunger and diseases. The atrocities and human rights violations are rampant. Aerial bombardment and massacres of civilians are the hallmarks of this war. Some of the young women captured in this war are sold as slaves. Countless women and children are maimed or raped. Many displaced Sudanese speak of the scorched-earth policy pursued by the government of Sudan, by which a whole community is displaced, their houses burned, and their crops destroyed.

OUT OF THE ASHES

In 1992, a group of displaced Sudanese women met in Nairobi and decided that despite their different ethnic, religious, racial, and political backgrounds, their common experience established several strengths among them. They formed an organization that would bring all the Sudanese women in Kenya together in seeking solutions to their problems as women.

Two years later, the government of Kenya formally registered the organization, Sudanese Women Association in Nairobi (SWAN). Today, SWAN has grown and branches can be found in Nakuru, Kitale, Eldoret, Kapenguria, and Kisumu. The organization's membership is made up of 23 ethnic groups. It serves approximately 500 households with a population of about 7,000.

UNITY AND ACTION

SWAN seeks to unite all Sudanese women in Kenya in a participatory manner that will enable the group to identify and prioritize its needs and formulate

strategies to meet those needs in a dignified, collaborative, and culturally appropriate manner.

At SWAN center, the women support each other in various activities. The main activities include income generation, functional literacy training, peace building, and vocational training. SWAN also supports member wellness through trauma counseling. Members also benefit from various types of training in such areas as HIV/AIDS awareness, food and nutrition, leadership training, and civic education.

The women are taught to read and write in English and Kiswahili. The training courses take about nine months. They are always eager to learn, and some advance to other learning institutions. One of the agencies that has been supporting the functional literacy program in SWAN is World University Service. Through their support, SWAN has been able to train nearly 100 women. To date, the SWAN literacy program has directly benefited more than 150 women.

The income-generating program is also at the core of the organization. It helps members create a livelihood for themselves. The program is set as a revolving loan fund. Through support from Lutheran World Relief, Kindernolte, and the Royal Netherlands Embassy, the program has been able to support more than 144 member households.

The biggest challenge faced by the organization is a shortage of resources to meet its stated objectives. SWAN serves a very large population with diverse social and economic needs. Most of the members are the heads of their families.

LEADING THE WAY FOR PEACE

SWAN's contributions toward peace have been an inspiration to many other organizations and political groups. Despite the fact that SWAN is made up of 23 ethnic groups drawn from warring factions

from both northern and southern Sudan, it has managed to reconcile the disparate collection into one harmonious group that is actively involved in the peace process. At SWAN center, members have been organizing regular peace prayers, believing that Christ has more power than any weapon made by man.

WHAT DOES CHRISTMAS MEAN?

To the women in SWAN, Christmas is a day to celebrate the gift of peace in Christ. It is the day that members remember those who are suffering in Sudan and those who have died in the struggle. It is also the time to thank our God and to ask God to help the Sudanese to restore peace in their country.

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

As people all over the world celebrate Christmas, let them all know that far away from their country, there are men, women, and children in Sudan who will not even remember that it's Christmas time as they helplessly watch their emaciated children die from hunger, as they remember their fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers who have been killed in this senseless war, as the bombs drop from the skies, tearing the women and children apart, and as mothers and fathers cry over their daughters who have been sold into slavery by the aggressors. This will be the 45th Christmas that the blood of the innocent will continue to flow in the Sudan. And for what? The Sudanese women in Nairobi will pray that everyone in the world realizes the contribution he or she makes toward this war.

For more information, write to Doris Strieter (8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631), call 800-638-3522 ext. 2465, or email strieter@elca.org.



Stopped Out and Now Going Back?

by Faith Fretheim

HAVE YOU STOPPED OUT OF YOUR COLLEGE EDUCATION AND ARE NOW THINKING OF RETURNING?

If so, the Women of the ELCA scholarship program may be able to assist you. We have a variety of scholarships available for women in undergraduate, graduate, professional, or vocational courses of study. You may be eligible for a scholarship if you: are a citizen of the United States of America, are a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, at least 21 years old, and you completed high school at least two years ago. Additional considerations include involvement in Women of the ELCA. The maximum amount awarded to any recipient is \$2,000, and you may receive assistance for a maximum of two years.

This year, the scholarship committee read 89 applications. Fifteen scholarships were awarded to the following women for the 2001–2002 academic year. The youngest recipient is 24, the oldest, 81. Hallelujah!

Heather Anderson

Houston, Texas,

Baylor College of Medicine
Medical Doctor

Elizabeth Coleman

Perkasie, Pennsylvania

Villanova University
*Master of Science in
Community Counseling
Psychology*

Marcia Ferguson

Apple Valley, Minnesota

Hamline University
K-12 Administrative License

June Johnson

Glenfield, North Dakota

Luther Seminary
*Gifts/School of
Lay Theology*

Rachel Anderson

Somerville, Massachusetts

Harvard Divinity School
*Master of
Theological Studies*

Anna Marie Crowder Reynolds

Athens, Ohio

Ohio University
*Master of Arts in
International Affairs,
African Studies*

Kimberly Gonia

Morrison, Colorado

Iliff School of Theology
*Master in Specialized
Ministry/Pastoral Care*

Marla Larson

Hannaford, North Dakota

Luther Seminary
*Gifts/School for
Lay Ministry*

Rebecka Andrae

Greensburg, Pennsylvania

University of Pittsburgh
*Master of Science in Child
Development*

concentration

Ethel Higgs

Blanco, Texas

Lutheran Seminary
Program in the
Southwest
Ordained Ministry

Ramona Miller

Canton, South Dakota

Southeast Technical
Institute
Computer Programming

Carrie Bryant

Portland, Oregon

Oregon Health
Services University
Medicine

Michele Dziadik-Willingham

Hobart, Oklahoma

The University of Oklahoma
*Master of Public
Administration*

Yu-Mei Huang

Oakland, New Jersey

Montclair State University
Computer Graphic Design

Irma Simms

La Porte, Texas

San Jacinto College
Chemistry

How can you assist women returning to school? Find out in the next *Lutheran Woman Today* scholarship article.

BETWEEN YOU AND ME

It's God's Church, Not Ours

by Catherine Braasch

SOME EXPERIENCES ARE JUST TOO GOOD TO FORGET. UNFORGETTABLE WORDS DEFINE THE MOMENT, GIVING THAT GLIMPSE OF GRACE THAT SUSTAINS US LONG AFTER THE WORDS HAVE GONE SILENT.

So it was on a summer afternoon—Sunday, August 12, 2001. I was sitting in a hallway at the Indianapolis Convention Center, watching the live webcast introducing our Presiding Bishop-elect, Mark Hansen.

Of the hundreds of questions submitted, only a few could be posed to Bishop-elect Hansen. The hour-long webcast ended with this query: “At the end of the day, how will you know you’ve done your job?” A smile and a sigh of relief radiated from the new presiding bishop as he praised God for the Lutheran witness to God’s free gift of grace. While speaking of gifts, he passed one along in the form of a prayer attributed to a pope long since freed from the bounds of earth:

Dear Lord, it’s your church, not mine. I’m tired. Good night.

Short, succinct, and simple, this prayer is passed from pontiff to presiding bishop to people like you and me—weary sinners all, in need of grace to end the day as well as to begin it. It is a prayer of trust and relinquishing, the fatigued adult’s version of “Now I lay me down to sleep. . . .”

Like grace, this prayer is a gift that keeps on giving. Trust me, I know. I’ve prayed this prayer every day since I first heard it. And even though I’m writing these words well in advance of the time you’ll see them in the December 2001 issue of *LWT*, my hunch is that I’ll still be praying this little prayer well into the coming church year.

Advent is a time for relinquishing and receiving, letting go and marveling at this Jesus who is just too good to forget, even though we sometimes do. Like this little prayer, this little gift of grace, the Christ child comes to remind us that it is God’s world and, yes, Christ’s church, not ours. This baby Jesus—bundled up, crying in anguish one minute, gurgling with laughter the next, all the while longing to receive us and to be received in us. Each night we relinquish our hold on that which is not ours to grasp in the first place . . . each morning we rise, praying, “Good morning, dear Lord. It’s still your church, not mine.” Thank you! I’m ready. Amen.

Catherine I. H. Braasch is executive director of Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

Teach Me My Needs

by Catherine Malotky

AT YOUR BIRTH, DEAR JESUS, HEAR MY CONFESSION:

I am a North American woman. I am surrounded by messages that call to me, try to convince me, and even manipulate me. The messages are everywhere I look—billboards, magazines, and television. Everyone wants to help me have a better life, and most of them are trying to sell something.

At times it's hard to know what's true. It's hard to read my longings and balance them with the needs of those I love. It's even harder to know how to balance my longings with the needs of those I don't know but confess are children of God, and therefore worthy of my concern. And it's equally hard to know how to balance my longings with the needs of the earth and the needs of generations to come. So what is true, dear Jesus?

Infant Savior, your needs at birth were clear. No doubt you clamored for your mother's breast. You needed burping, and a way to stay warm so you could grow. You needed holding so you would know you were loved, because we must know that to survive. What can you teach me, baby Jesus, about my needs? Can you help me distinguish needs from wants? Can you help me see how to grow in grace and wisdom? Can you help me live an uncluttered and genuine life of love and justice? Can you help me live your way?

I know that when I neglect such learning, when I am not thoughtful and prayerful about my life, the powers of evil raise their heads. I can turn away, so easily deny those who rankle me, or wear on me, or who simply pass under my radar. I can so easily say, "Just this one time," and soon it is a habit that damages me or others. I can surround myself with distractions and miss you, little baby, asleep in the manger.

I am afraid to give up too much, that I will not have enough. Yet you have promised that I am your own. How could you forget your nursing child (Isaiah 49:15)? How can I not trust that you will care for me?

In this season, baby Jesus, teach me to sit quietly. Teach me to rock with you deep into the night of my soul. Safely in my creator's embrace, show me the places that are so often hidden. Help me discern my needs and wants.

And as I uncover these truths, give me courage to release those things I do not need. Help me trust in your faithfulness to provide.

Catherine Malotky serves in communications at the ELCA Board of Pensions. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, writer, and retreat leader. She and her husband have two daughters.

READER CALL

TOPICS AND DEADLINES

Mail or email to *LWT* Editorial Office

May 2002

Do you see yourself as a leader? Why or why not?

Due January 10, 2002

June 2002

Share a momentous transition of your own or of someone you care about. How was your response to that shaped by your faith?

Due February 10, 2002

July/August 2002

How do you discern God's call?

Due March 10, 2002

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TOPICS AND DEADLINES

Use the enclosed card or email IdeaNet@elca.org

May 2002

Vacation Bible School

When do you have it, who is it for, and what materials do you use? Share some ideas that might benefit others.

Due January 10, 2002

June 2002

Listen God is Calling

The theme for the Triennial Gathering is "Listen God is Calling." How do you listen to God? How do you discern what you believe God is saying to you?

Due February 10, 2002

July/August 2002

Where and how do you go on vacation to get away for rest and renewal?

Due March 10, 2002

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May the God of compassion,
Whose love is more powerful
than all those who would harm us,
Give us healing for what has been,
and peace for all that is to come.

From the ELCA's Division for Global Mission "Prayer Around the Cross"

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